

THAD COCHRAN

UNITED STATES SENATOR

Biography



March 2004

Thad Cochran was born December 7, 1937, in Pontotoc, Mississippi. His father, William Holmes Cochran, was the principal of the Beckham school and his mother, Emma Grace Cochran, was a teacher. They later moved to the Hurricane community and then to Tippah County where Thad began school in the town of Walnut.

Summers were spent by the family, which included Thad's younger brother, Nielsen, on the campuses at the University of Mississippi, where their parents would earn Masters degrees, and at Blue Mountain College, where they were members of the faculty.

In 1946, the Cochrans moved to Hinds County near Jackson. While school always came first, there was much time devoted to sports, music, the Boy Scouts and church activities. Thad became an Eagle Scout and helped establish a new scout troop at Spring Ridge Methodist Church. He served as its first Junior Assistant Scout Master.

At Byram high school, Thad earned varsity letters in football, basketball, baseball, and tennis. He gave a piano and voice recital his senior year and was class valedictorian. He was also a member of the 4-H Club and Daniel Memorial Baptist Church.

During junior and senior high school, Thad worked in a variety of after school and weekend jobs. His first regular job was at Gunn's Dairy Bar where he was a "car hop." He clerked at Nicholson's Grocery store, cleared right-of-way for Deviney Construction Company, and helped his father and brother on the family's cattle farm near Utica.

In 1955, Thad enrolled in the school of liberal arts at the University of Mississippi. He earned a B.A. degree with a major in psychology and a minor in political science. He was elected President of his social fraternity, Pi Kappa Alpha, was a company commander in the Navy ROTC, Vice President of the Student Body, and was selected for membership in Omicron Delta Kappa, national honorary leadership fraternity. During the summers, he worked as a life guard at Livingston Lake in Jackson.

When he graduated from Ole Miss in 1959, he was commissioned an Ensign in the U.S. Naval Reserve and assigned to duty aboard a heavy cruiser, the USS MACON, which was homeported in Boston, Massachusetts. He served on this ship for 18 months becoming the ship's legal officer after graduating as an honor student from the U.S. Navy School of Justice in Newport, Rhode Island. He also became qualified as

Officer of the Deck, in port and underway.

When his ship was decommissioned in January 1961, he was assigned to the staff of the Commandant of the Eighth Naval District in New Orleans, Louisiana, to complete his two year tour of active duty in the Navy.

In the fall of 1961, he enrolled in the School of Law at the University of Mississippi. At the Ole Miss law school he won the Frederick Hamel Memorial Award for having the highest scholastic average in the first year class. He was selected for membership in Phi Delta Phi, honorary legal fraternity; served on the editorial board of the Mississippi Law Journal; argued before the Mississippi Supreme Court as a moot court finalist; and was elected Chairman of the Honor Council.

Before graduating from law school, he was awarded a Rotary Foundation Graduate Fellowship and studied jurisprudence and international law for a year at Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland. During this year abroad, Thad spoke to numerous Rotary Clubs and other groups in Ireland on the subject of the civil rights struggle in Mississippi and the United States. He also won the Hillary Term Moot Court competition sponsored by the Dublin Law Society.

On June 6, 1964, he was married at the First Methodist Church in New Albany, Mississippi, to Rose Clayton, who had graduated from the University of Mississippi in 1963.

During his last year of law school at Ole Miss, he served as Article Editor of the Mississippi Law Journal and was selected for membership in Phi Kappa Phi, national honorary scholastic fraternity. Several years later when he delivered the graduation address at the law school, Dean Parham Williams observed that Thad Cochran's law school grade point average was the third highest of all students who had graduated from the Ole Miss law school during the decade of the 1960's.

During the summer vacation months in the law school years of 1962, '63, and '64, Thad returned to active duty in the Navy and taught military law and naval orientation at the Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant in the U.S. Naval Reserve.

After graduating from law school, he joined the firm of Watkins & Eager in Jackson, one of the state's most respected law firms. He was made a partner in the firm in only two and one-half years.

He served as President of the Jackson Men's Y Club, member of the Board of the Jackson Rotary Club, and member of the Board of Mississippi Opera, Inc. Thad organized the first Mississippi chapter of the American Field Service and served as charter President to sponsor foreign exchange programs for high school students.

He was Chairman of the Legal Services program of the Jackson Junior Bar, Chairman of the Mississippi Law Institute, a continuing legal education program for Mississippi lawyers, and in 1971 he was elected President of the Young Lawyers Division of the Mississippi Bar Association. He was also named that

year by the Jaycees as Jackson's Young Man of the Year and as one of the Three Outstanding Young Men of the Year in Mississippi.

Politics and government were subjects of much interest in the Cochran family. As early as 1951, Thad accompanied his mother as she drove through her hometown of Utica, and helped deliver door to door a campaign tabloid for the Paul B. Johnson, Jr. campaign for Governor. His father was a surrogate in the campaigns of Felder Dearman for Highway Commissioner and Jack Tubb for State Superintendent of Education. Thad often traveled with his father and helped with voter registration for these campaigns.

Later, Thad Cochran became active in other political campaigns on his own. He appeared on television for the first time to endorse Fred Thomas for Sheriff of Hinds County in 1967. He was Hinds County Chairman in Brad Dye's successful race for State Treasurer, and he wrote talking points and issue briefs for Charles Sullivan's campaign for Governor in 1971.

The Presidential campaign of 1968 marked the first time he became involved in a political campaign for a Republican candidate when he served as Executive Director of Mississippi Citizens for Nixon-Agnew.

Four years later, Thad Cochran was elected United States Congressman for the Fourth District which included twelve counties in southwest Mississippi. He was appointed to the Public Works and Transportation Committee, which had jurisdiction over economic development, transportation and flood control.

He also served on a Republican task force to study the energy crisis, and he contributed to the writing of a report that was published in book form by the House Republican Conference. He was appointed later to the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct and the Select Committee on Ethics which wrote a new ethics code for Members of Congress.

After winning re-election to the House in 1974, he was elected by his colleagues to represent the southern states on the House Republican Policy Committee. He was re-elected to the House of Representatives again in 1976. In both of his races for re-election, Cochran received over 70 percent of the votes.

In 1978, Thad Cochran was elected to the United States Senate becoming the first Republican in over 100 years to win a statewide election in Mississippi. He was re-elected in 1984 in a race with Governor William Winter with over 60 percent of the votes. In 1990 he was unopposed, and in 1996 he was re-elected to a fourth term in the Senate with over 70 percent of the votes. His margin of victory in the 2002 election was 85 percent.

Senator Cochran has served as Secretary and Chairman of the Senate Republican Conference. He is Chairman of the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee. He is in line to be Chairman of the Appropriations Committee in the next Congress.

His legislative record includes the sponsorship of the National Missile Defense Act of 1999, the Campaign Finance Reform Act, as well as, key provisions of several farm bills.

Senator Cochran has also written legislation that provides federal funding for education programs such as teacher training, vocational education, libraries, and educational television. He served as a member of the National Education Goals Panel. Numerous university based research projects have been funded with Senator Cochran's assistance including energy, agriculture, and forestry facilities at Mississippi State University, the Polymer Science Center at the University of Southern Mississippi, the Natural Products Center, Water and Wetlands Center, and Food Service Management Institute at the University of Mississippi, the National Warmwater Aquaculture Research Center at Stoneville, and the Jackson Heart Study by Jackson State University and the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

He authored the Mississippi Wilderness Act which is the first federal legislation ever passed for the perpetual protection of lands in the State of Mississippi. He has also influenced the protection of wildlife habitat and helped establish national wildlife refuges as a member of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, and he authored the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. In 1994, he was named by Ducks Unlimited as Conservationist of the Year in Mississippi. He was named Conservationist of the Year in 1996 by the North American Waterfowl Federation and received the Conservation Achievement Award from the National Wildlife Federation. He has received the lifetime achievement award of The Nature Conservancy.

Mississippi park and recreation areas he has helped develop, maintain and improve are the Natchez Trace Parkway, the Natchez Historical Park, the Vicksburg National Military Park and the Gulf Islands National Seashore.

As a member of the Defense Appropriations subcommittee, he has worked successfully to support the Navy's shipbuilding programs and the various military bases and installations in Mississippi. Senator Cochran has served on the Board of Visitors of the Air Force Academy and as Chairman of the Board at the Military Academy at West Point. He is now a member of the Board of the U.S. Naval Academy.

During previous Congresses, Cochran served on the Senate Ethics Committee, the Judiciary Committee, the Labor and Human Resources Committee and the Committee on Indian Affairs. Service on these committees has enabled him to be actively involved in the writing of laws affecting a wide range of issues including rural development, health care, and criminal law.

Senator Cochran has been awarded honorary degrees from Kentucky Wesleyan College, Mississippi College, Blue Mountain College, and the University of Richmond. He is a Member of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution and the Board of the Museum of American History.

He is a member of Northminster Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi. He and his wife, the former Rose Clayton of New Albany, Mississippi, have two grown children and a grandson.